

## Employee Spotlight: Monika Bittman

June 2, 2014



Monika Bittman has wanted to be an artist ever since she was a little girl in Prague, Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic. Today Bittman applies her creative eye and attention to detail in her work as a web designer at the Laboratory and on weekends spends as much time as possible painting in her Santa Fe studio.

Expressing herself artistically is a way to learn about herself and the world for Bittman. The upheavals of growing up in a Soviet-controlled country, defecting to the West in 1979 and subsequently emigrating to the United States have left her with a deep yearning for unhindered expression, harmony and peace, especially during her own creative experience.

"I took stock some years ago of how I approach art," Bittman says with a smile.

"Instead of relying on my art training in Europe and my master of fine arts degree from the University of New Mexico, I try to free myself of my own biases, judgments and expectations. The only goal I set for myself when I'm in my studio is to be engaged and to create out of the vitality of each moment, my current frame of mind and the behaviors of the different materials I use. The process is joyous, full of discovery and humbling."

Several years ago a neighbor introduced Bittman to the Japanese sumi-e and Chinese ink-splash approaches to painting, both of which inspired her to become even more curious about the innate qualities of her paints and what she herself brings to each piece.

## Painting at the Grand Canyon

Bittman's willingness to surrender a large part of her creative process to what shows up in the moment was tested last winter when she spent three weeks at the Grand Canyon as a National Park Service artist-in-residence.

"The Grand Canyon was both exhilarating and terribly challenging for me," Bittman explains, "because especially at first I found it difficult to resist the expectation that the canyon environment should be reflected in my art. It was not until the last week of my stay that I fully recognized that my creativity does not flow freely if I impose any ideas about the outcome."

Yet Bittman's art is highly evocative of the natural world. The paintings in her Space Series, for instance, look like careful renditions of Southwestern canyon landscapes. "By working with thin paint on small panels, moving them around and manipulating them, I allow the properties and dynamics of the paint to interact with gravity, time and me," Bittman notes. "I no longer 'paint' in a traditional sense but find that patterns emerge nonetheless that are reminiscent of larger structures in nature."

Bittman is silent for a moment. "The stillness of the vast, undisturbed canyon," she adds thoughtfully, "was affecting me on a deep level, showing me the ease of simply being and creating from within this ease."

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At the Lab, Bittman works in the Information Resource Management Division's Communication Arts and Services group.

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## Resources

To learn more about Bittman and her art, visit the [Monika Bittman](#) website.

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